

Deaf individuals are human beings with the right to autonomy. Unfortunately, on occasion interpreters forget this right in regards to scam calls in VRS.

My mother and father are Deaf and I grew up as a "language broker," where I acted as more of a mediator than an interpreter. However, in my training and work, I have had to learn the difference between a child broker and a professional interpreter. In society as a language broker, I filtered and even altered information to maintain the peace. And I even went as far as to make decisions on my parents' behalf. As I trained to be a professional interpreter, I learned the essential difference between my past experience and the role of an interpreter. Ethically mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act, professional interpreters are trained to interpret information accurately and impartially. This directly negates the ability to alter content and it demands that we, the interpreters, foster autonomy for our consumers.

I have worked in VRS for nearly 8 years and I have seen and heard a variety of calls, including scam calls. And I have also managed a call center for the past 3 and a half years, where I have trained interpreters regarding, policy, procedure, and best practices. One question I always get from new VRS interpreters is what to do when it comes to scam calls. And my answer is to always connect the call and interpret the content as accurately and impartially. I remind people that it is not only policy, but mandated by law and our Professional Code of Conduct.

The moment we choose to not connect the call, we take away the right to autonomy for our callers. The moment interpreters consciously alter or omit information, they are implicitly stating the Deaf person is incapable of understanding the content. Deaf people should have equal access to every call, opportunities to be exposed to the real world, and the right to make their own decisions. Many individuals are exposed to scams in our society. While it is unfortunate, it is not the place of the interpreter to prevent these scams from happening. There are strategies that interpreters can employ to relay the emotion and tactics that someone is using to scam someone.

Have Deaf people been scammed through VRS? Yes, of course they have. Along with email scams, fake checks in the mail, and other schemes. However, so have other Americans who are not Deaf. Most Americans do not have a third person in the middle relaying information and they are regularly exposed to scam calls. In VRS, the Communication Assistant, also known as Video Interpreter, does not know whether a call is truly a scam or not. Who are we as interpreters to interfere or make decisions on behalf of our Deaf callers? As interpreters, we hold tremendous power! It is a privilege to have such power and with each decision we make regardless of the type of VRS call, it is an interpreters' response that decides whether a person is humanized or dehumanized.

In conclusion, we, VRS interpreters, are not language brokers, we are professional interpreters who must not alter content or eliminate information. Interpreters do not know whether a call is or is not a scam and therefore, are obligated to connect every call. If we need to protect anyone or anything, we need to protect human rights and autonomy for every individual. I ask that the FCC clarify the role of interpreters when it comes to interpreting perceived scam calls in VRS.

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